Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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EDITORIAL

Since I took over as Editor of your journal in September 1985, I have been encouraged by the response to articles which have appeared, and by the regular correspondence I have received. Sadly this has recently declined, and to my surprise, when I came to put together this issue, I found I had insufficient copy. So in this issue, you will find a rather long article I have hurriedly completed, and a page of Guatemala, rather than our usual mix.

The success of a journal of this sort is dependant upon regular and varied contributions, or subscribers will not renew, and the journal will become financially unviable. If you intended putting pen to paper PLEASE DO, and if you did not intend doing so, then please consider making a contribution. We are looking for specialist articles of course, but we would also like to have your queries on anything philatelic, however basic. You have at your disposal some of the finest philatelic minds in the world; use them.

Finally may I remind you of the forthcoming THEMATICA '88, to be held, as last year, at the Carisbrooke Hall, Seymour Street, London, on Saturday 28 May 1988, from 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.. Again John Fosbery is promoting Thematic Collecting in a big way, and since no-one else is putting the same effort into this branch of collecting, this will again be the Thematic highlight of the philatelic year.

Mike Birks

SPANISH MAIN Annual subscription £5 (UK), £6 (Europe), $15 (elsewhere) The subscription includes four copies of Mainsheet, and also private treaty lists and auction catalogues.

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The society also runs two specialised groups, the Central American and the Chile groups. The subscription to each group is £3 (UK) or $7 elsewhere, to Spanish Main members, or $10 to non-members (Overseas subscriptions only). This includes four copies of the respective Newsletter.

THE "NICARAGUAN" CANCELLERS OF THE US FLEET

by Michael P Birks

The Presidency of José Santos Zelaya (1893-1909) was one of extremes. On the one hand his sixteen year rule was brutish tyranny, punctuated by seventeen uprisings, whilst of the other his programme of social and economic development meant that Nicaragua prospered as never before.

In 1909, whilst attempting to unseat him, two American adventurers were captured and executed. This act prompted the US Secretary of State, Philander C Knox, to expel the Nicaraguan representative in Washington, and describe Zelaya as "a blot on the history of his country".

Zelaya fled to Europe; this last attempt to unseat him apparently being the final straw. He had invested the Nicaraguan treasury in Belgian railways, and as a result of nationalisation at the outbreak of the Great War, he died penniless.

Zelaya left behind him a state of near anarchy, and the Conservative political party (Zelaya was a liberal) appealed for help to Washington. Thomas C Dawson was sent to sort out the economic chaos, and marines were landed in Bluefields, the only area of the country at that time not controlled by the Government.

Following a serious revolutionary outbreak in July 1912, the USS Annapolis set sail for Corinto, Nicaragua. Upon arrival on 4 August 1912, a detachment of sailors proceeded to Managua, where a regular Legation Guard of 105 marines was established from 9 January 1913 to 1 August 1925.

No special cancellers were supplied during this period, although several postcards of Bluefields are known bearing the cancellation of the USS Padua, dated 1910 (CANL 24, p42-3).

The withdrawal of the marines in 1925 was shortlived, and their return lasted until 1933. During this time both land based forces and US ships had thier own cancellers. The former were dealt with in an earlier article (CANL 12, p2-4) and subsequent up-date (CANL 16, p2). Regarding the ships, those eligible for inclusion in a collection, with dates of eligibility, were dealt with in CANL 8, p6-9. This article deals exclusively with those ships' cancellers inscribed with the name of a Nicaraguan town and "Nicaragua".

When the US marines returned to Nicaragua in 1926, they were, from a postal point of view, better prepared than before. A range of cancellers of common design was supplied to ships of the US fleet, for use on mail originating from Nicaragua.

The "standard" Nicaraguan canceller consisted of a 30mm single circle to the left of three parallel bars, between which is found the name of a Nicaraguan town and "NIC" or "NICARAGUA". In some cases more than one canceller was supplied to the ship, probably as a result of damage to the first; of course a change in location required

a change in canceller. In some cases this simply meant changing the place name, but in others a different canceller was supplied.

What follows is a survey of the covers I have been able to examine, some one hundred and fourteen in all, but only one of some examples has been seen. Readers should exercise caution in drawing inferences regarding rarity, since time and collectors can skew the most normal distribution. Clearly some are scarce in view of their limited use, and information regarding periods of usage, as well as ships not mentioned here, is invited.

USS Antares

The first Antares was launched on 30 May 1919 by American International Shipbuilding Corporation of Hog Island Pennsylvania, named "Nedmac", for the shipping board; she was transferred to the navy on 14 November 1921, and commissioned on 23 February 1922, Lieutenant Commander R E Pinkham USNRF in command.

In the peacetime navy Antares was designated fleet target repair and photographic ship, serving as such from her commissioning until July 1932. From March 1923 to the end of 1928 she was flagship of Commander Train, Squadron 1, Scouting Fleet and later, Fleet Base Force, US Fleet. During this time she was employed at ports on the east coast and participated in fleet concentrations and manoeuvres in the Caribbean.

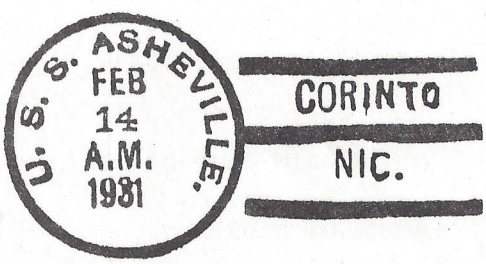
The canceller used by the Antares is typical of the type supplied to the ships of the US fleet. Only one example has been examined (fig 1, from the collection of Kilian Nathan of Zurich), although judging by the distortion of the single circle and the bars, it saw regular use. It is dated 25 December 1932.

USS Asheville

The first Asheville was launched on 4 July 1918 at the Charleston Navy Yard, and was sponsored by Miss Alyne J Reynolds. The ship was commissioned on 6 July 1920, with Lieutenant E Buckmaster in command.

Her first assignment was to the Special Services Squadron in Caribbean waters during 1920-22. In 1929 she rejoined the Special Services Squadron in Caribbean waters, but returned to the Asiatic fleet in 1932.

The canceller supplied to the Asheville was of the standard type, but appears to be much sturdier. The only example I have seen (right, again from the collection of Kilian Nathan) shows a thickening of the circle and bars which does not appear to be overinking. This single example is dated 14 February 1931.



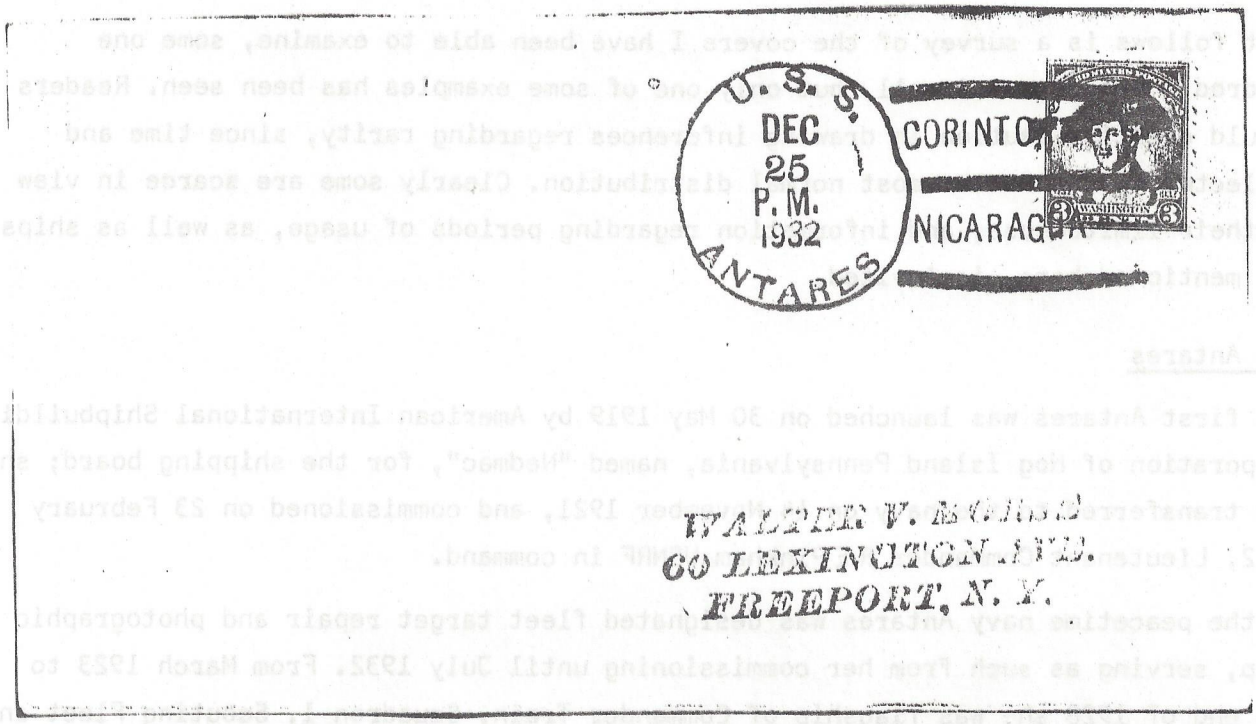
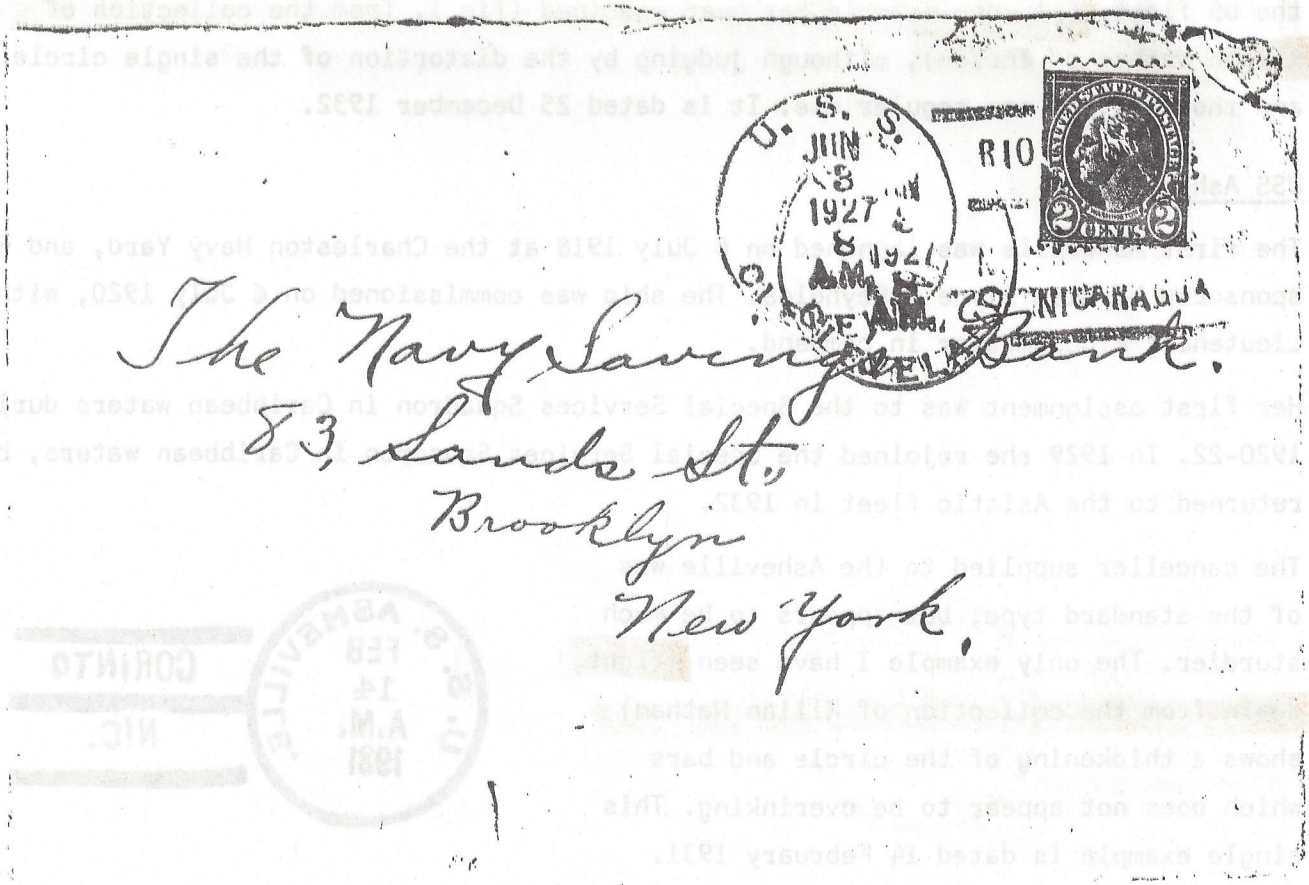


Figure 1 (above)

Figure 2 (below)

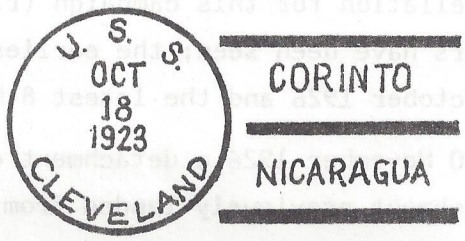


USS Cleveland

The first Cleveland, a protected cruiser, was launched on 28 September 1901, by the Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine. It was sponsored by Miss R Hana, was commissioned on 2 November 1903 and had Commander W H H Sutherland in command.

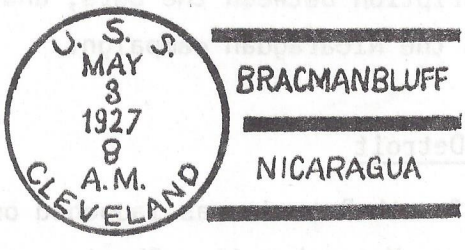
Cleveland alternated patrols in waters off Mexico and Central America with reserve periods at Mare Island navy yard between 1912 and 1917, protecting American lives and interests from the turmoil of revolution. She returned to patrols off Central and South America with the Pacific fleet from 16 February 1920. During her service she made courtesy calls, supported diplomatic activities, gave disaster relief and represented American interests in troubled areas. She was decommissioned at Boston on 1 November 1929.

Between 1912 and 1925 a legation guard was maintained in Managua, being withdrawn upon the signing of the Bryan-Chamorro treaty. The Cleveland was one of the ships in support of the marines. The illustration on the right is the only example reported from the Cleveland, inscribed "Corinto", from this period, and is dated 18 October 1923.



A detachment of marines from the Cleveland landed at Bluefields on 6 May 1926 after revolution erupted in Nicaragua. They remained ashore until 15 June. The canceller in use is the same type as used earlier in Corinto, and may even have been the same one with "CORINTO" replaced with "BLUE-FIELD". Two examples have been seen; both in June 1926, on the 2nd and 12th respectively.

A new canceller was employed off Bracmanbluff. Although of the same basic design as the earlier cancellers, the date occupies five lines and reads MONTH-DAY-YEAR-NUMERAL-TIME (AM/PM). Only one cover has been seen, and it is dated 3 May 1927.



Later in May the same canceller, suitably inscribed for use in Rio Grande was being employed (Figure 2). Two covers have been examined; the earliest is dated 13 May 1927 and the latest 3 June 1927.

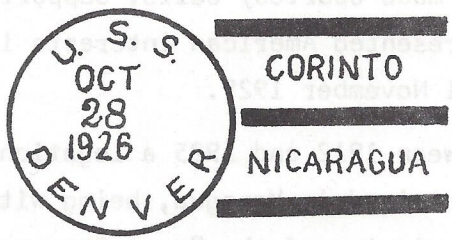
The following month (July) the same canceller was in use in Corinto, suitably inscribed. Two examples have been seen, both are dated July 1927; "JUL/7/1927/4/P.M." and "JUL/20/1927/8/A.M.".

USS Denver

The USS Denver was launched 21 June 1902 by the Neafie and Levy Ship and Engine Building Co., Philadellphia, Pennsylvania. She was commissioned 17 May 1904, with Commander J B Murdock in command.

On 9 October 1922 she sailed to the Canal Zone, where for eight years of service, she was based at Christobal. She patrolled both coasts of Central America, protecting American interests, transporting various official parties, and paying courtesy calls, returning periodically to Boston for overhaul.

On 10 October 1926 a detachment of marines and seamen were landed at Corinto to protect American lives and property. Mail from the ship was cancelled with the standard ship's cancellation for this campaign (right). Four covers have been seen; the earliest is dated 28 October 1926 and the latest 8 November 1926.



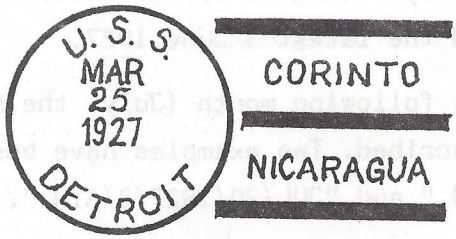
On 30 November 1926 a detachment of marines was landed at Bluefields, relieving a detachment previously landed from the USS Rochester. Two cancellers were employed on mail out of Bluefields similar to the earlier "Corinto" canceller, but inscribed "BLUEFIELDS". The first carried just the date, and the second includes the time (AM/PM). Eighteen covers of the first type have been examined; the earliest is dated 6 December 1926 and the latest 23 February 1927. Thirty four covers of the second type (with AM/PM) have been examined; the earliest is dated 21 January 1927 and the latest 18 August 1927.

By 25 February 1928 (exact date unknown) the canceller no longer contained any inscription between the bars, and so presumably was no longer in use in connection with the Nicaraguan campaign.

USS Detroit

The fourth Detroit was launched on 29 June 1922 by the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corp., Quincy, Massachusetts. She was sponsored by Miss M Couzens, daughter of the Mayor of Detroit, and commissioned on 31 July 1923 with Captain J Halligan Jnr in Command.

Only one example of this canceller has been examined, and it is dated 25 March 1927. The single circle shows damage to the parts which lie between the horizontal bars, although this damage is not so pronounced as that occuring to the Trenton canceller (see page 118).



The cancellor is struck in blue and is now in the Kilian Nathan collection.

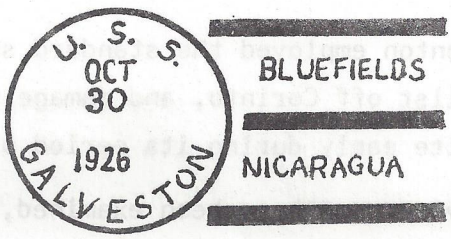
USS Galveston

The USS Galveston was laid down on 19 January 1901 by William R Trigg Co., Richmond, Virginia, and launched 23 July 1903. She was commissioned at Norfolk, Virginia, on 15 February 1905 with Commander W G Cutler in command.

Galveston was recommissioned on 5 February 1924 for duty with the Special Service Squadron. She based most of her operations out of Cristobal and Balboa, Panama, in a series of patrols that took her off the coast of Honduras, Cuba and Nicaragua.

On 27 August 1926 she arrived at Bluefields, Nicaragua, landing a force of 195 men at the request of the American Consul to protect American interests during a revolutionary uprising. Thereafter much of her time was spent cruising between that port and Balboa to cooperate with the State Department in the restoration and preservation of order, and to ensure the protection of American lives and property in Central America.

Two covers have been examined; the earliest is dated 14 September 1926 and the latest 30 October 1926. Mail was cancelled with the usual 30mm single circle canceller with three bars (right), inscribed "BLUEFIELDS/NICARAGUA".

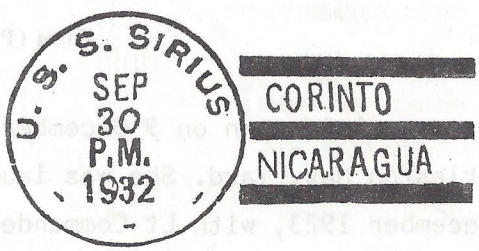


Galveston resumed her watchful cruises between Balboa and Corinto until 19 May 1930. Ten covers have been examined, all cancelled with the canceller illustrated above, with "BLUEFIELDS" removed and "CORINTO" inserted. The earliest cover is dated 20 November 1926 and the latest 9 May 1927.

USS Sirius

The first Sirius, ex-SS Saluda, was built in 1918 and 1919 by the American International Shipbuilding Corporation, Hog Island, Pennsylvania. She was acquired from the War Shipping Board on 10 December 1921 and commissioned on 20 January 1922. Sirius was assigned to the Naval Transportation Service carrying cargo and passengers in support of fleet units and bases. For many years, Sirius operated along the coasts of the United States, continuing her resupply operations to various United States naval bases and fleets until 1937.

Only one cover has been examined, dated 30 September 1932. Mail was cancelled with a cancellor bearing the ship's name in the upper half of a 30mm circle, with three dashes in the lower half.



This cover is in the Kilian Nathan collection.

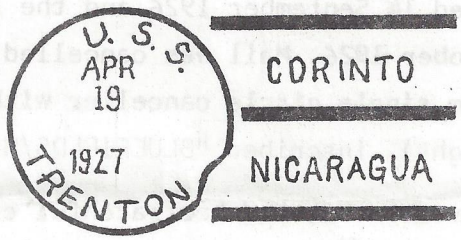
USS Trenton

The second Trenton was laid down on 18 August 1920 at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by William Cramp & Sons, and launched on 16 April 1923. She was sponsored by Miss Katherine E Donnelly and commissioned on 19 April 1924, with Captain Edward C Kalbfus in command.

Trenton participated in manoeuvres until just before Christmas 1926, when the units of the Scouting Fleet dispersed to their home ports for the holidays. In May 1927 she was called upon to transport Colonel Henry L Stimson, a special observer in Nicaragua during a period of internal disorder. She embarked Col and Mrs Stimson at Corinto and carried them back to Hampton Roads.

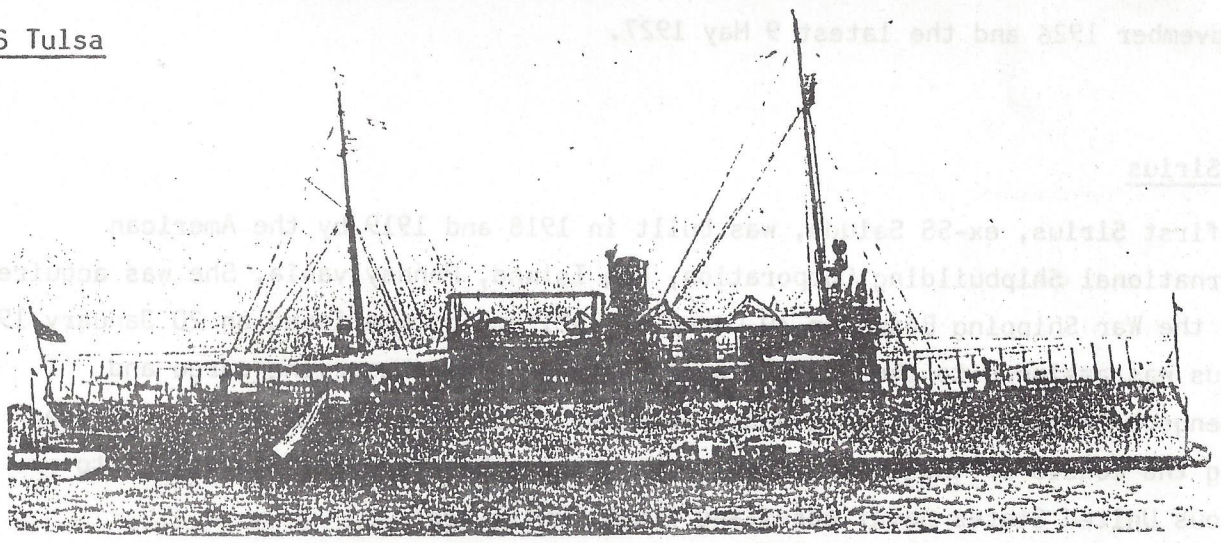
In January 1928 Trenton and her division embarked marines at Charleston and returned to Nicaragua, where they landed to assist in supervising the elections which resulted from Col Stimson's visit.

Trenton employed the standard ship's canceller whilst off Corinto, and damage was sustained quite early during its period of usage.



Five covers have been examined, of which only one with an illegible date shows the canceller undamaged. The remaining four are dated from 17 April 1927 to 26 April 1927.

USS Tulsa

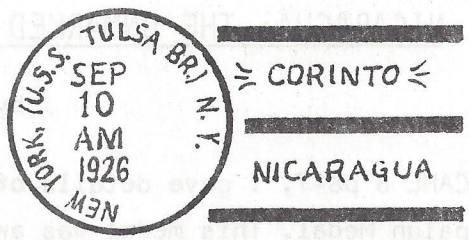


Tulsa (PG-22)

Tulsa was laid down on 9 December 1919 at Charleston, South Carolina, by the Charleston Navy Yard. She was launched on 25 August 1922, and commissioned on 3 December 1923, with Lt Commander M Doyle jnr in temporary command.

When civil strife broke out in Nicaragua in the late 1920's, details of marines and bluejackets from Tulsa landed to protect and preserve property.

The earliest Tulsa canceller is a 30mm single circle inscribed "NEW YORK, (U.S.S. TULSA BR.) N.Y." with "CORINTO/NICARAGUA" between the bars (right). Four examples have been examined the earliest dated 29 August 1926 and the latest 13 October 1926.



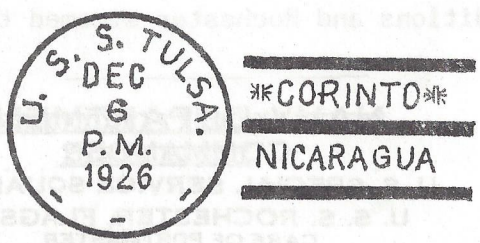
Later in 1926 the Tulsa was in service off Bracman's Bluff, according to the new inscription between the bars of the canceller. Being too big to fit between the upper two bars, the name has been split "BRACMANS/BLUFF-NIC". Five examples have been examined, the earliest 16 November 1926, and the latest 12 December 1926. None of these examples retain the ornamentation in evidence at the sides of "CORINTO".

By the middle of 1927 the Tulsa was stationed off the northenmost point of Nicaragua's east coast. The same canceller was still being used, but this time inscribed "PTO CABEZAS/NICARAGUA" between the bars. The only example seen is dated 26 June 1927.

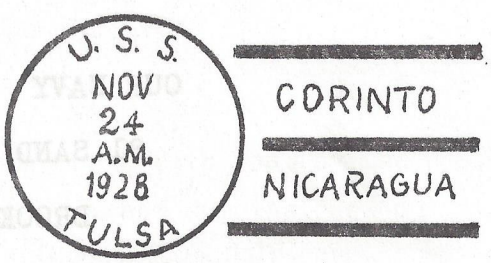
A few months later we find the Tulsa off Bluefields, still employing the same type of canceller (perhaps even the same canceller), inscribed "BLUEFIELDS/NICARAGUA" between the bars. Three examples have been examined; the earliest is dated 10 June 1927 and the latest 21 August 1927.

A second type of canceller is found used in Corinto, between the earliest and latest dates given for Bracman's Bluff. Apparently the ship tended not to remain in one place too long, and this new canceller was brought into service, rather than change the wording in the old.

Is it possible that the two cancellers were in use simultaneously, ie one on board ship and one ashore with some of the ship's crew or marines? Unusually this canceller (right) has the ship's name at the top, and three dashes in the lower half. The bars are also closer together. The ornamentation to the sides of "CORINTO" is different from the earlier canceller. Two examples have been examined, the earliest is dated 6 December 1926 and the second the day after.



The Tulsa returned to Corinto in 1928, and a third type of canceller was employed, this one being the usual type of ship's canceller previously described and illustrated (right). The single circle contains the month-day-time-year above each other. Three covers have been examined; the earliest is dated 31 January 1928 and the latest 24 November 1928.



Apparently the Tulsa was not stationed permanently in Corinto between these dates since a fourth type of canceller, not inscribed "NICARAGUA", is known dated 17 October 1928.

NICARAGUA: THE UNMARKED SHIP'S CANCELLERS OF THE U.S. FLEET.

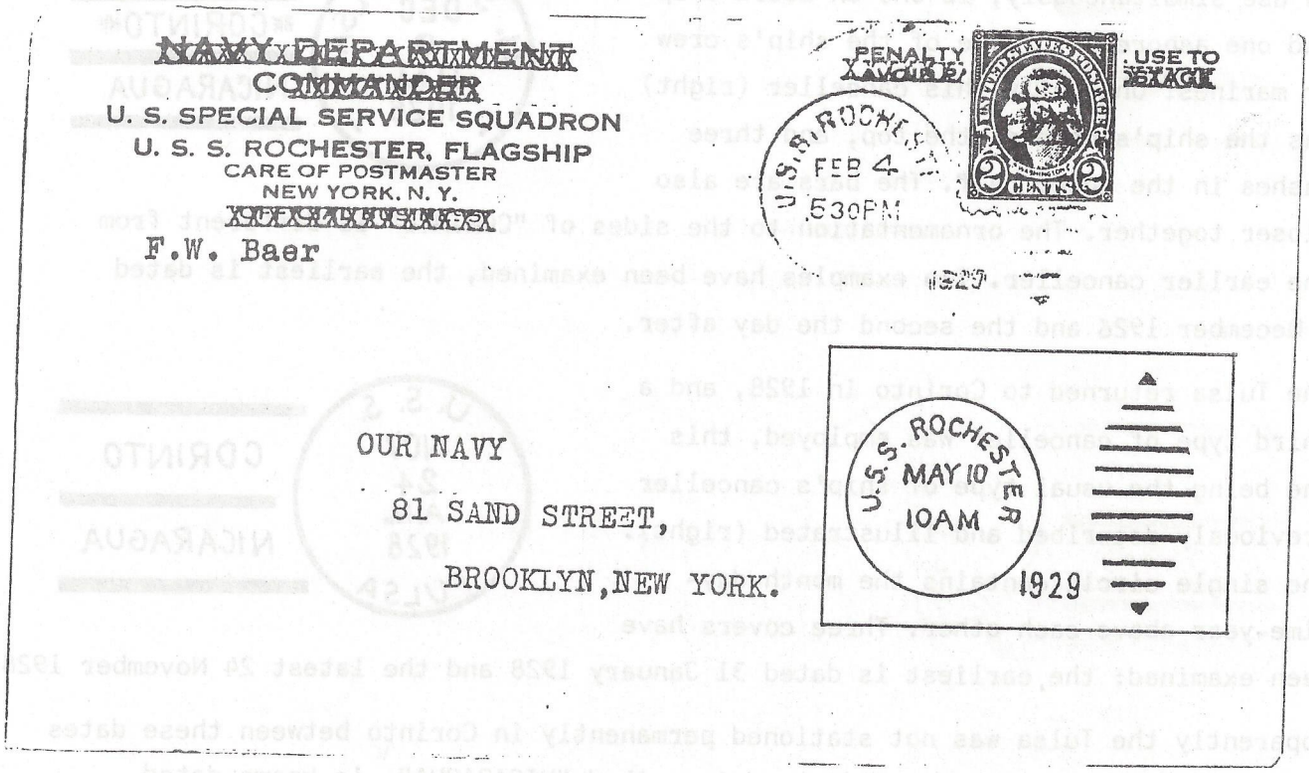
by MICHAEL P BIRKS

In CANL 8 p6-7, I gave details of the eligibility of ships for the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal. This medal was awarded to marines and sailors deemed to have rendered useful service during the campaign, and the dates therefore give accurate information as to when ships were in Nicaraguan waters, and hence dates for which covers can be considered to be part of a Nicaraguan collection. In the absence of more detailed information (ie searches of ship's logs) this is still the most reliable guide to the identification of unmarked mail from this campaign. By unmarked I mean cancellers not specifically inscribed "NICARAGUA". Since that time I have been able to examine covers which fall within this period of elegibility from the Rochester and Richmond.

USS Rochester (originally USS New York)

The fourth ship by the name of New York, was an armoured cruiser, authorised by Congress in 1888, and laid down on 19 September 1890 by William Cramp and Sons of Philadelphia. She was launched 2 December 1891, with Captain John Philip in command. She was renamed Saratoga 16 February 1911, and later Rochester on 1 December 1917.

In September 1926 she helped bring peace to turbulent Nicaragua and from time to time returned there in the late 1920's. After a quiet 1927, Rochester relieved Tulsa at Corinto, in 1928, as Expeditionary forces directed efforts against bandits in the area. Following the 1931 earthquake, Rochester was the first ship to arrive on the scene and ferried refugees from the area. Bandits took advantage of the chaotic conditions and Rochester steamed to the area to counter their activities.



Six covers whose dates fall within the dates of eligibility given in CANL 8 have been examined. All bear the cancellation illustrated on the previous page. That cover is typical of those examined.

USS Richmond

The third Richmond was laid down on 16 February 1920 by William Cramp and Sons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was launched 20 September 1921 and commissioned 2 July 1923, being commanded by Captain David F Boyd.

Sometime in June or July 1928 she departed San Pedro, California, for Corinto, with a navy battalion embarked. By 25 July she was in the Panama Canal, and did not return to Nicaragua.

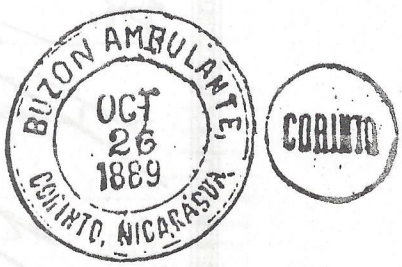
Here we have a ship whose officers and men were not deemed eligible for the Nicaraguan Campaign Medal but clearly took part in events. Covers cancelled in the first two weeks of July would appear to be of interest. Only one such cover has been seen, dated 12 July 1928, and the canceller employed is of the same type as that used on the Rochester.

Details of the cancellers employed by the Tulsa brings to a close my article on the "Nicaraguan" cancellers of the US fleet. I believe this also fills a gap in the writings on the subject since I have been unable to unearth any information in print on this subject. I am sure that having set the ball rolling, correspondence will be generated, and in six or nine months time I shall be able to tabulate this information and incorporate more accurate dates of usage, and hopefully report on any ships I may have overlooked.

The ships' biographies given in pages 112-121 are taken from a "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships", Edited by J L Mooney. I wish to acknowledge the help given by Richard T Speer of the Naval History Division, Washington, and Richard Graham of Columbus, Ohio, who supplied photocopies of entries.

I would also like to thank Kilian Nathan and John Fosbery for supplying photocopies of covers which enabled me to examine far more material that I would otherwise have been able to do.

NICARAGUA Kilian Nathan of Zurich sends us a photostat of a rare postmark he has recently acquired. This Buzon Ambulante of Corinto is dated 26 October 1889, which is a very early usage of this cancellation. Or do you know of one earlier?



GUATEMALA collectors may be interested to know a catalogue of over 30 publications dealing with their chosen country, is available from Mr J C Andrews, PO Box 298, Conway, NH 03818, USA.

GUATEMALA: UNDATED TOWN MARKINGS - AN UNLISTED SAN MARCOS

by Mrs Cécile Gruson

Handbook "Guatemala 1" lists under "CUT" numbers (p220-1) undated round and oval town markings. In my opinion, these should be divided into several very different categories:

a) cancellers: CUT 4, 5 and maybe 6.

b) negative or intaglio markings: CUT 8.

c) official post office markings: CUT 1, 2, 3, 7 and maybe 6.

The postal stationery item illustrated below is cancelled by an unlisted example of this last category.

The official post office markings should really be classified with the oval datestamps CDT 30 to 34, which are also official post office cancellations. It may be that the undated devices were not intended to be cancellers but rather pre-paid indicia or letterheads. As so often happened in Guatemala though, they were used as cancellers from time to time during rush periods or because the regular device was worn or broken beyond use. This latter explanation seems to apply to San Marcos around the turn of the century as items are known with the boxed "Franqueado en San Marcos" handstamp, similar to pre-stamp CPS 105.

This undated SAN MARCOS marking is known used as a cancellation or transit mark between cNovember 20, 1902 and February 1, 1903. It is known used as a cancellation on an official cover, besides my item, and also as a transit mark on two further covers. Are other examples of this cancellation known?